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Request for conversion from intergovernmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to specialized agency of the United Nations

Letter dated 21 December 2001 from the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations*

I have the honour to recall our meeting in November at United Nations Headquarters when I informed you that the **World Tourism Organization wished to initiate the process of its transformation into a specialized agency of the United Nations**.

Over the years, tourism has become an inescapable phenomenon of today's world. It is now the primary source of international trade receipts. It contributes to development and poverty alleviation, and its cultural, social and environmental impacts are quite remarkable. For these reasons, the World Tourism Organization members believe that the United Nations would doubtless like to increase its involvement in monitoring and managing world tourism development, and consequently, strengthen its relations with the organization it entrusted with this mandate.

This perspective also mirrors the wish of our institution. At its fourteenth session at Seoul, Republic of Korea, and Osaka, Japan, in September 2001, our General Assembly adopted resolution 420 (XIV), in which it states that it "believes that steps should be taken to study the possibility of transforming the organization into a specialized agency of the United Nations system" (annex 1). It is on the basis of the guidelines thus established by the supreme organ of our institution that I am addressing this letter to you and that we are initiating the procedure indicated by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs.

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* The annexes referred to below are on file with the Economic and Social Council secretariat and can be examined by member States upon request.

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The World Tourism Organization was established as a result of the transformation, between 1970 and 1975, of the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO) into an intergovernmental institution. The World Tourism Organization's statutes were approved by the Extraordinary General Assembly of IUOTO in Mexico on 27 September 1970.

From the outset, the World Tourism Organization has aligned itself with the United Nations family, of which it is a "related agency". It was created pursuant to resolution 2529 (XXIV) of 5 December 1969 of the United Nations General Assembly (annex 2) which wished to confer on the future institution a "decisive and central role ... in the field of world tourism". Article 3, paragraph 3, of the World Tourism Organization's statutes refers to this "central role" and provides that "in order to establish its central role in the field of tourism, the organization shall establish and maintain effective collaboration with the appropriate organs of the United Nations and its specialized agencies".

More specifically, the Agreement on Cooperation and Relationships between the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization approved by the General Assembly by its resolution 32/156 of 19 December 1977 stipulates that the World Tourism Organization "shall be invited to send representatives to attend in an observer capacity meetings of the Economic and Social Council or its subsidiary organs, conferences convened by it and meetings of the other United Nations bodies which deal with matters of common interest and to participate, with the approval of the body concerned and without the right to vote, in debates on questions of concern to the World Tourism Organization". In addition, the General Assembly in its resolution 36/41 of 19 November 1981 decided that "the World Tourism Organization may participate, on a continuing basis, in the work of the General Assembly in areas of concern to that Organization".

In application of these provisions, the World Tourism Organization participates, as the need arises, in the meetings of various organs and committees of the United Nations. The World Tourism Organization's Secretary-General has been called on to address the United Nations General Assembly on several occasions, more recently its Second Committee on 19 November 2001.

The World Tourism Organization has also acquired the status of a specialized agency of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) by virtue of an agreement signed with this body on 15 May 1976. It is on the basis of this agreement that the World Tourism Organization is entrusted with executing a broad majority of UNDP-funded cooperation projects in the field of tourism.

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By virtue of an agreement signed on 23 December 1995 with the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund and after the organization had revised the internal rules governing the management of its staff with a view to bringing them into line with the United Nations *common system*, the World Tourism Organization staff adhered to this retirement scheme. During my trip to New York, it became clear after consulting with Mr. Moshen Bel Hadj Amor, the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission, that there is nothing in our staff regulations that is liable to oppose this new development. Our Executive Council will therefore be invited to draw the corresponding conclusions and formally adopt, at its next session in June

2002, the Statute and Rules of Procedure of the International Civil Service Commission.

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There is also call to mention that the ties linking the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization have become ever closer in recent years and that our members would now like to see this relationship culminate in the acquisition by the organization of the status of a specialized agency of the United Nations.

The World Tourism Organization has also concluded formal cooperation agreements and established working relations with various specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations (UNESCO, WHO, WMO, UNEP, regional commissions, etc.). The transformation of the organization into a specialized agency would be instrumental in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of these cooperation mechanisms under the coordination of the Economic and Social Council, eliminating duplication and increasing synergy. This rationalization would be particularly beneficial considering the extent to which tourism, a multidisciplinary activity by nature, converges with the interventions and competencies of numerous institutions.

Moreover, the World Tourism Organization's principal initiatives have, with increasing frequency, been submitted to the approval of the United Nations, which has entrusted the organization with carrying out a number of activities that concern all the institutions in the system. On 1 March 2000, the United Nations Statistical Commission approved the tourism satellite account methodology prepared by the World Tourism Organization, and at its last session, the United Nations General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Economic and Social Council, adopted a comprehensive resolution on the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism adopted by the World Tourism Organization at its General Assembly in Santiago, Chile, in 1999. In 2002 the organization will coordinate, with UNEP, the activities of the International Year of Ecotourism declared by the United Nations General Assembly, in application of a request formulated by the Commission on Sustainable Development, in the framework of its discussion of tourism during its seventh session in 1999. The organization was associated with the *Earth Summit* held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, with the special follow-up session of the United Nations General Assembly held five years later and with the aforementioned seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In 2002, it will be one of the United Nations agencies involved in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

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The World Tourism Organization Statutes, adopted on 27 September 1970, continue to govern, without notable changes, the operation of our organization.

Attached to this letter (annex 3), as requested by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, is the list of the amendments to the Statutes adopted by our General Assembly and pending ratification, as established by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Depository of the Statutes. None of these amendments has formally come into force for want of ratification by two thirds of our members, as stipulated in article 33 of the Statutes. However, our General Assembly has on several occasions decided to apply certain amendments provisionally, pending their ratification. Also attached to this letter (annex 4) is a certified copy of the Statutes and the Financing Rules, also statutory, including the modifications that have been introduced.

At the conclusion of its last General Assembly, the World Tourism Organization had 139 member States and 6 Associate Members. Its headquarters have been established in Madrid, Spain, since 1 January 1976. As requested, a certified list of these members is attached to this letter (annex 5). The organization also has over 300 Affiliate Members of all types. In compliance with the World Tourism Organization's Statutes, Associate and Affiliate Members participate in the organization's activities on a purely technical and consultative basis and do not take part in the decisions taken by the various organs insofar as these decisions fall within the exclusive competence of the member States in view of the World Tourism Organization's intergovernmental character.

The World Tourism Organization disposes of its own resources and its budget is, for the most part, financed by the contributions of its members on the basis of its own scale of contributions. The organization's finances are sound; it has a financial surplus and no debts. It should be noted that the financial independence that characterizes the organization means that its possible transformation into a specialized agency of the United Nations will not entail any cost for the Organization.

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Pursuant to the aforementioned resolution 420 (XIV) of our General Assembly and in accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, and article VI of the 1997 agreement between the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization, **I have the honour to request the inclusion in the draft provisional agenda of the next session of the Economic and Social Council an item relative to the transformation of the World Tourism Organization into a specialized agency of the United Nations**. I have addressed a copy of this letter to H.E. the President of the Economic and Social Council.

In accordance with the procedure indicated by the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, our Executive Council will be informed of these steps at its next session and will be asked to set up a body to discuss this matter with the ad hoc Committee that will be created by the Economic and Social Council to negotiate the modalities of a possible transformation.

(*Signed*) Francesco **Frangialli**